

Great British rides

Half the fun can be designing your own routes, yet there are plenty of off-the-shelf tours designed by other people, not least CTC – visit <http://www.ctc-maps.org.uk>. The ten rides here are just to kick start your ideas. Many are traffic free, not because that's the only way to tour but because it's an easier way to begin. All are mapped, except the straightforward Bealach na ba circuit, and many are signed as well.

Day rides

The Camel Trail, Cornwall

The UK's most popular tourist cycle route attracts 350,000 cyclists each year. It's a 17-mile ex-rail route beside the River Camel from Poley's Bridge to Padstow, via Bodmin and Wadebridge. It's ideal for younger children riding their own bikes or sitting in trailers, and while riding both ways is a long day out you can just ride from Wadebridge to Padstow and back, a 12-mile round trip. See <http://www.visitcornwall.com>.

Hartington, Peak District

The village of Hartington gives easy access to three excellent old railway paths: the High Peak Trail (17.5 miles), the Tissington Trail (13 miles) and the Manifold Way (8.5 miles). Despite the Peak District hills, cuttings and embankments keep these trails mostly flat, although the High Peak is exposed in places. YHA Hartington Hall, a 17th century manor house, is a nice place to stop for families, and Alton Towers theme park is nearby. See <http://www.visitpeakdistrict.com>.

Lôn Mawddach Trail, North Wales

The Mawddach Estuary is stunningly beautiful, with watercolour Welsh hills heaped up about a broad, peaceful estuary. The trip from Barmouth to Dolgellau is 11 miles each way, mostly along an old railway path. The pub at Penmaenpool part way does food. If you're here for a few days, the off-road trails of Coed y Brenin are nearby. See <http://www.cyclingnorthwales.co.uk>.

The Cuckoo Trail, Sussex

An 11-mile ex-rail path from Heathfield to Polegate, with an onward link to Eastborne. It runs through farmland and deciduous woodland, with interesting sculptures en route. Once again, it follows the route of a dismantled railway, making it good option for children on their own bikes. For a PDF leaflet, visit <http://www.eastsussex.gov.uk> and follow the links: Leisure and Tourism, Discover East Sussex, and Walks.

Putney Bridge to Weybridge, London

Yes, touring in London. Escape the hurly-burly of the capital into peaceful greenery. This 18-mile route runs mostly on riverside paths alongside the Thames and also takes in Richmond Park. For a shorter option ride from Kingston Upon Thames, which is nine miles from Weybridge. Sustrans' Thames Valley Cycle Route (London - Oxford) has all of this route and more. Get it from <http://www.sustrans.org.uk>.

Longer rides

Taff Trail, South Wales

This is a 55-mile largely traffic-free route from the middle of Cardiff up to Brecon, passing Pontypridd and Merthyr Tydfil en route. You don't have to cycle both ways as the Brecon Bike Bus connects Cardiff and Brecon on Sundays between May and August. Sustrans' Lon Las Cymru South map covers the Taff Trail and more. Get it from <http://www.sustrans.org.uk>. See also <http://www.tafftrail.org.uk>.

Bealach Na Ba Circuit, North West Scotland

Explore the Applecross Peninsula, which is just across the sea from Skye. Cycle clockwise from Shieldaig, taking in Britain's most spectacular road climb – for which you will need very low gears. The 43-mile circuit could be done in a day by fit families with tandems or teenagers, or you could camp or B&B in Applecross. See <http://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/applecross/peninsula/index.html>.

Coast to Coast, Northern England

Spend three or four days riding 140 miles across northern England from Whitehaven on the west coast to Sunderland on the east on minor roads and traffic-free trails. Around 12,000 cyclists make the trip every year, and the mapping, signage and facilities are accordingly good. Going west to east has the wind at your back (usually) and means short steep climbs and long downhill. See <http://www.c2c-guide.co.uk>.

The South Downs Way, South East England

A 100-mile off-road chalk hills trail between Winchester and Beachy Head. It's not technically demanding in mountain biking terms but it does require a good level of fitness to do the whole thing. Allow three or four days, or just do bits of it. See <http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/Southdowns>.

Land's End to John O'Groats

Britain's ultimate big ride. Take three weeks to cycle a scenic 1,000-mile route from the tip of Cornwall to the top of Scotland, covering around 50 miles a day. Children as young as nine have ridden this on their own bikes, but it will be easier with tandems, or older children.